Army Values and a Rope With Three Cords

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That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
and follows but for form, will pack when it
begin to rain, and leave thee in the storm.[1]
—*The King's Fool,* King Lear

IT IS AXIOMATIC that leaders must put selfish interests aside and take care of those whom they lead. To allege otherwise would blatantly refute all the military values and ethics we hold dear. Once we accept that, unlike Shakespeare's fair-weather figure, good leaders internalize their obligation to care for those they lead, the vexing issues are what taking care of soldiers actually means and how doing so translates into battlefield success.

Most military leaders certainly understand what the phrase does not mean. It does not mean that leaders should keep soldiers out of harm's way at all costs; if it meant that, there would be little use in having an army in the first place. It clearly does not mean that leaders should provide soldiers the same level of comfort that their fellow civilians enjoy or that soldiers should not work or train under hard physical and psychological conditions. A military organization taken care of this way would be coddled to its grave in battle. Despite centuries of leadership principles and dogmas, it is still difficult to detail concisely what exactly it means to take care of one's soldiers and exactly how that care facilitates mission success.

By borrowing a phrase from the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes, leaders can understand a soldier as a "rope of three cords."[2] I characterize these three cords of the soldier as spirit, sinew and significant others and contend that leaders truly care for soldiers by ministering to the needs of those cords. When parents allow their sons and daughters to join the American profession of arms, they repose the deepest special trust and confidence in military leaders to develop and nurture the spirit, sinew and significant others of their children. Further, the seven Army Values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage provide leaders with the most effective rubric to use in constructing soldier-care oriented command climates.

In terms of values, the US military establishment is inherently dualistic. On the one hand, it preserves and promotes Judeo-Christian values upon which the founding fathers based our national system of government. On the other hand, the military has, to an extent, molded itself to the times. To some degree, the values of the military as a whole are the values of its parts; namely, the values of the women and men who have elected to serve in the All-Volunteer Force. While these two sets of values are not necessarily mutually exclusive, significant conflicts cause an undercurrent of tension at all levels. In a way, this is a natural state for the US military.

Because humans wage war, victory ultimately rests with the side whose soldiers can best perform the often-horrific tasks required amid war's physical chaos and psychological trauma. . . . Keegan notes that "the study of battle is therefore always a study of fear and usually of courage; always of leadership, usually of obedience; always of compulsion, sometimes of insubordination. . . . It is necessarily a social and psychological study."

Believing that any particular country "has the kind of [military] its total ethos, its institutions, resources, habits of peaceful life, make possible to it," British journalist and social philosopher D.W. Brogan characterizes the United States as a "country which is law-respecting without being law-abiding."[3] Free of the centuries-old cultural rigidity of European

countries and thus free of European class segregation, Americans view authority and authoritarian bureaucratic structures with healthy skepticism.

Thus, in the US military, there is "more give-and-take, more ignoring of unessentials, more confidence that in the hour of battle human virtues and common sense will do as much as automatic discipline of the old eighteenth-century type."[4]

On the battlefield, simultaneous forces can significantly diminish a soldier's spirit. . . . Leaders cannot afford to argue that such issues are solely in the chaplain's lane and dismiss them as "touchy-feely" concerns for which they have neither the time nor the temperament. Rather, leaders have an obligation to find ways to minister to their soldiers' spirits, especially under conditions of hardship and stress. The Army values provide a way to do that.

Therefore, if the US military hopes to instill a set of values central to both organizational effectiveness and individual character development, then our military will have to work harder than similar organizations in more stratified and traditional nation-states. This work begins with understanding the unique needs of each cord that make up the soldier (spirit, sinew and significant others). When leaders know their soldiers under this rubric, they will be able to apply Army Values directly and teach the soldiers to apply the values themselves. In short, Army values are combat multipliers and must take their rightful place in leaders' kitbags.

Despite postmodern claims to the contrary, war is essentially a spiritual endeavor. Both morals and morale are critical to unit success, but the cord of the soldier that I characterize as spirit encompasses and supercedes either of these individually. Because humans wage war, victory ultimately rests with the side whose soldiers can best perform the often-horrific tasks required amid war's physical chaos and psychological trauma. John Keegan notes that war requires, "if it is to take place, a mutual and sustained act of will by the two contending parties, and if it is to result in a decision, the moral collapse of one of them."[5] Keegan does not say that victory necessitates the physical collapse of the opponent. Because battle is essentially moral or spiritual, "the study of battle is therefore always a study of fear and usually of courage; always of leadership, usually of obedience; always of compulsion, sometimes of insubordination . . . . It is necessarily a social and psychological study."[6]

If the study of battle is the study of morals, then it is also a study of values and of how values are either reinforced or defeated in combat. Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall said that of all the lessons his innumerable interviews with combat veterans taught him, the most valuable was "the falseness of the belief that wealth, material resources and industrial genius are the real source of a nation's military power."[7] Marshall concluded that simple "courage is the real driving force in human affairs . . . and . . . every worthwhile action comes from someone daring what others fear to attempt."[8] Thus, we see that a soldier's spirit, the first of the three cords of the soldier, is of utmost importance to military leaders who hope to succeed under conditions of great stress. Marshall notes that, to effectively minister to the soldier's spirit, leaders must abandon "slide rule" leadership and concentrate on "knowledge of the human heart."[9] Army Values provide an effective, accessible rubric for understanding the human heart. If internalized, these values will enable soldiers to overcome significant physical and psychological stresses and complete their missions with honor.

On the battlefield, simultaneous forces can significantly diminish a soldier's spirit. Enemy propaganda tries to convince our soldiers that our cause is unjust, our leaders corrupt and our chances of victory slim. In an open society, even "friendly" or nonaligned media may make similar claims. Combat itself can diminish soldiers' ability to discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate targets and even diminish the value of life itself among war-weary soldiers. Since ancient times war narratives have recounted deployed soldiers' alienation from all that they valued in the past and hoped for the future.[10] Leaders cannot afford to argue that such issues are solely in the chaplain's lane and dismiss them as "touchy-feely" concerns for which they have neither the time nor the temperament. Rather, leaders have an obligation to find ways to minister to their soldiers' spirits, *especially* under conditions of hardship and stress. The Army values provide a way to do that.

By emphasizing loyalty and engaging soldiers in meaningful discussions about its many dimensions, leaders can deflect soldiers' doubts about the justice of a particular project. Leaders can acknowledge that private doubts about the moral legitimacy of legal orders are natural in stressful and life-threatening situations. However, the soldiers' oath upon entering the profession of arms is taken

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With temperatures in the low teens, a 2d Infantry Division soldier on the Elsenborn Ridge, Belgium, chases wires without gloves or a winter parka, 23 December 1944. The raised sleeve and white wrist reveal the cold's effect on his right hand.

"Months after the new combat boots and jackets arrived in Italy many frontline soldiers still wore soaked leggings and flimsy field jackets. The new clothing was being shortstopped by some… soldiers who wanted to look like the combat men they saw in the magazines. None of these shortstoppers took the clothing with any direct intention of denying the stuff to guys at the front. I suppose these fellows in the rear just looked at the mountainous heap of warm combat jackets piled in a supply dump and didn't see anything wrong with swiping a couple for themselves. [However], the Army had shipped over only enough of the new clothing to supply the men in the foxholes."

"freely, without mental reservation or purpose of evasion."[11] If orders and ethics conflict, our only options are to disobey lawful orders and face the legal consequences, or resign from the service at the earliest opportunity. While we remain in uniform, our primary loyalty is to the oath we took when we came in, and leaders who remind soldiers of this during times of mental stress will enable them, despite fear and danger, to do what they already know intuitively is right.

Leaders can use the Army values of duty, respect and selfless service to help soldiers address the potential devaluation of life that combat can cause. If we understand duty as fulfilling our obligations, then it becomes clear, that even under stress, we have an obligation to respect other people, treating them as we want others to treat us.[12] In relation to citizens of an enemy country, this means that we earnestly discriminate between combatants and noncombatants when we use force. If we fail to do our duty to demonstrate such respect for other lives, especially if we fail to do so in a quest to bring a greater measure of safety to ourselves, we violate the Army value of selfless service. We cannot honestly say that we place the welfare of the nation and the Army above our own individual welfare if we disgrace both by doing unnecessary harm. Army values help prevent soldiers from sacrificing their integrity under stress.

The second of the three cords of the soldier is sinew. By this term, I mean to describe the soldier physically. The soldier has physical needs that leaders are obligated to meet. No matter how hearty the spirit, even highly trained, conditioned and disciplined soldiers cannot fight long if not physically sustained. Army values are not magic wands; they cannot provide rations to hungry soldiers, bullets to empty rifles or fuel to dry gas tanks. Whereas virtually all leaders understand their obligation to sustain their soldiers physically, and the US Army logistics system is perhaps the best in the world,

history shows that soldiers unnecessarily suffer physical hardships even in the midst of plenty. Primarily, such failures to provide for soldiers' sinew reflect a flawed value system of those charged with the special duty of doing so. A story of such a lapse in values occurred in World War II.

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Similarly, a surrounded infantry company in Vietnam, low on ammunition, awaited resupply:

"An Army UH-1 helicopter hovered over the company to kick cases of ammunition out the side door. The ammo was supposed to land within the company's perimeter. The helicopter pilot radioed down that the fire was so heavy he was going to leave without dropping all the ammunition on board. [A lieutenant on the ground] radioed back: "If we don't get it, you don't leave." The pilot could not be sure whether the beleaguered lieutenant would make good on his threat to shoot him down. He stayed until all the ammunition was kicked out. It was an accurate drop."[14]

In both cases, it is fairly easy to see how solid leadership could have refocused the soldiers' attention on their core values and given them the moral armor to accomplish their mission with honor. The uniform example shows how easy it is for soldiers to become selfish and disrespect their comrades when they either think the offenses will not hurt anyone or simply do not care whom they hurt because the victims are far removed. Logistics leaders need to exemplify and reinforce selfless service, loyalty and integrity, remembering that even the appearance of impropriety can cause almost irreparable damage to the relationship between combat and support units. The Vietnam example shows that personal courage is a core value necessary for all dimensions of military life.

In a broader sense, senior leaders responsible for soldier's sinew must practice a core values-based planning process that will prevent the kind of supply problems that almost halted the Allied advance across France in World War II. During the Normandy campaign, values failures among some senior logisticians almost spelled disaster.

"Surges of demand were well out of phase with supply. Thus, the Army, after months of artillery ammunition shortages, ended the war with more ammunition in European storage than was fired during the entire eleven-month campaign . . . failures of accountability and inspection contributed to shortfalls as supply personnel could not locate needed items. Perhaps more critically, many US senior officers were indifferent toward supply matters. Although tolerating no insubordination in the conduct of tactical matters, they often [were themselves personally guilty of violating logistics orders and policies set at theater level]. Beyond that, a "us versus them" relationship between the combat and service forces hindered the supply efforts."[15]

Leaders can only feed the sinew of the soldier when they selflessly place soldier welfare above interagency, interunit or interpersonal rivalries and carry out the sustainment mission with integrity and honor. Sometimes it takes personal courage to fight bureaucratic inertia or high-level ignorance of true conditions to get the soldiers' needs to the line when needed. In fairness, combat soldiers themselves can contribute (sometimes significantly) to their own supply problems. At least in the Normandy Campaign, "the American Army had weak supply discipline . . . Wherever American troops traveled, they left a trail of discarded equipment in their wake. What they did not throw away they often sold or bartered for something useful such as food."[16] I personally witnessed the same phenomenon during the after-operations phase of Operation *Desert Storm*. I saw dumpsters at the port of Ad Dammam full of discarded serviceable field gear that soldiers evidently felt was too much trouble to pack and ship home. The Army value of respect applies to Army equipment, which American taxpayers have funded

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A civilian contractor turns over the key to a factory-fresh M1A1 tank to the 2d Armored Division's Tiger Brigade in Saudi Arabia, fall 1990

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and for which soldiers have a duty to be responsible stewards. Army values are essential tools as leaders take care of soldiers' sinew, the second of the three cords.

The significant others who surround a soldier form the third cord. While the term seems perhaps a bit too "New Age" for a discussion of Army values and leadership, it effectively describes how leaders must understand soldiers in terms of interpersonal relationships that extend far beyond the unit itself. These extended relationships directly affect soldiers' ability to perform under stressful conditions and leaders must understand their role in maintaining and strengthening their soldiers' relationships outside the unit. Gone is the old attitude that the Army would have issued you a family if it wanted you to have one. Over half of the soldiers in the Army are married, and many of those who are not are either single parents or custodians of one or both of their own parents. The Army now strives to help soldiers keep their family lives in order with childcare facilities and classes on child rearing, checkbook management and marital stress. Programs such as Army Emergency Relief offer resources in family crises. Family housing on most posts has improved steadily over the past few years, and unit family support group planning, organization and management are taught at precommand courses. The Army has internalized its institutional responsibility to minister to soldiers' significant others.

Nevertheless, the Army faces significant challenges in this area. Deployments are increasing in both frequency and duration. Money shortages have slowed infrastructure repair and construction throughout the Army. The transition to TRICARE has thrown family health care in turmoil. Retirement benefits do not amount to as much as they used to, and Army transition assistance programs are overtaxed with mid-career soldiers seeking to leave while they are still young enough to develop a full second career in the civilian sector. All Army values come into play as leaders assess their obligation to their soldiers' significant others. Loyalty extends to the families of soldiers as well as the soldiers themselves. Families who support the unit in good faith ask only that unit leaders display that same kind of loyalty in passing out information and taking care of family concerns while the unit is deployed.

The Army has a duty to provide the families of its soldiers the aforementioned facilities and services and must never succumb to the attitude that a quality living environment is a nice to have extra that we must forsake in order to buy more weapons. The Army should take every opportunity to display respect for family members, promoting unit appreciation awards, volunteer recognition ceremonies and similar programs. Army leaders must be as selfless as possible in the cases where a soldier's family needs directly conflict with unit needs. Do you

really need the soldier bad enough to deny him emergency leave during an NTC rotation to attend his grandmother's funeral? Granting the leave may well take personal courage on the part of the leaders, especially if the soldier is in a shortage job specialty, but doing so would undoubtedly show soldiers the integrity and honor of their seniors.

Leaders, by personal example and thoughtful education of subordinates, can make a difference when it counts the most by simply recognizing that, to a new soldier, that unit constitutes the whole Army. The commander becomes the soldier's impression of what commanders in the Army essentially are. The soldier makes similar judgements about the first sergeant and other leaders.

Conversely, leaders must take every opportunity to instill in soldiers the notion that they themselves must translate the seven core Army values into core family values as well. If the soldier fails to do so, no amount of outside help will keep his or her family together when the unit deploys. Thus, Army values provide a rubric for understanding and ministering to soldiers' significant others, the third cord. "The relationships between seniors and subordinates within our Army should be based upon intimate understanding. . . on self respect. . . and above all, on a close uniting comradeship."[17] This is not to say that fraternization rules should relax or that everyone needs to like everything about everyone else in the unit. However, leaders, by personal example and thoughtful education of subordinates, can make a difference when it counts the most by simply recognizing that, to a new soldier, that unit constitutes the whole Army. The commander becomes the soldier's impression of what commanders in the Army essentially are. The soldier makes similar judgements about the first sergeant and other leaders.

To the new soldier, everything from the standing operating procedures regarding passes to the way the unit conducts motor stables reflects what the Army as a whole is about. When it comes time to reenlist, the soldier makes a decision about a future in the Army based upon his or her experiences in one small corner of it. That experience, in my view, is positive only to the degree that the unit leaders have exemplified and promulgated the core Army values.

Army values have an instrumental role in taking care of the three cords of soldiers, but their impact extends beyond specific positive effects as a combat mutiplier. The values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage also possess intrinsic value, independent of any extrinsic goods they might foster. Army values have deep, historic national roots. The day we renounce these values we fundamentally alter our national identity. While the primary missions of the Army are to deter war through combat readiness and win war if it is forced upon us, the military also has another very important mission. Because its members generally internalize the values they practice daily, a military serves as "a well from which to draw [moral] refreshment for a body politic in need of it."[18] A person can be "selfish, cowardly, disloyal, false, fleeting, perjured and morally corrupt. . . and still be outstandingly good [in many pursuits]. . . What the bad man cannot be is a good sailor, soldier or airman. Military institutions thus form a repository of moral resource which should always be a source of strength within the state."[19] Army values shape that repository as they shape the force. ***MR***

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, "The Tradegy of King Lear," in *An Oxford Anthology of Shakespeare*, Stanley Wells, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2.2.251-54.
2. *The Bible*, Today's English Version, Ecclesiastes 4:12, "A rope with three cords is hard to break."
3. D.W. Brogan, *The American Character* (New York: Knopf, 1944), 162.
4. Ibid.
5. John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 301-302.
6. Ibid., 303.
7. S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 208.
8. Ibid., 209.
9. Ibid., 156.
10. I use the term alienation here to denote the feeling of being forcibly disconnected from the things one thinks are valuable to a meaningful life by circumstances beyond one's control.
11. Lawrence P. Crocker, *The Army Officer's Guide*, 42d Edition (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1983), 5.
12. The Army values card issued to every soldier defines respect as "treating others as they should be treated." While one could take this a number of different ways, I assume here that the authors of the card are inferring that all people should be treated with a certain level of dignity and respect, in accordance with the proverbial Golden Rule, which is a basic pillar of the American way of life.
13. Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (New York: Award Books, 1968), 135-137.
14. George C. Wilson, *Mud Soldiers* (New York: Scribners, 1989), 22.
15. Steve Waddell, *United States Army Logisitcs: The Normandy Campaign, 1994* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 164-165.
16. Ibid., 165.
17. Marshall, 155.
18. Sir John W. Hackett, "The Military in the Service of the State," *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History*, Number 12, (Colorado: United States Air Force Academy Press, 1970), 19. Hackett also offers the idea that this mission may, in the long term, be more important that the more immediate and instrumental mission of warfighting.
19. Ibid., 18.

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